Business Communication as Cultural Text:

Exchange and Feedback of Promotional Video Clips

Abstract

Our research is a response to the need to improve understanding of the complexity of global professional communication. To investigate the complex cultural interpretations that producers and audiences apply to professional texts, we developed a two-year interactive project. Business students in New Zealand and Israel produced promotional "texts"—video clips to promote a university program—which they exchanged with their counterparts overseas to receive feedback. We adapted models of home-made visual communication and advertising which used the categories of participants, settings, topics, and style, to analyze the eight clips. Emergent findings suggested two more categories—information and language—as important analytical tools. Variables of age, gender, intra- and intercultural differences, and (cultural) context also resulted in student audiences' multiple interpretations of the texts. The outcomes indicate the need to extend the culture-in-context approach for a "situation focused communication approach," where the primary focus is a group of producers and their audience as they produce and interpret a professional text. This approach also foregrounds contextual variables and a plural understanding of culture to accommodate the potential for miscommunication of business and professional texts in pluricultural contexts.

Key words: intercultural communication, global professional communication, business communication, visual communication, New Zealand, Israel

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1. Introduction

Professional business communication is becoming increasingly intercultural, virtual, and change focused in the face of workforce diversity and the globalized business arena. These forces of change have emphasized the need for successful exchange of professional and business communication across cultural boundaries. Yet how people engage in and successfully negotiate intercultural professional communication—the work related communication processes in which people from differing cultural backgrounds come into direct contact and interaction with one another (Kim, 2001; Scollon & Scollon, 2001)—is under-researched. In particular, how culture influences this communication across cultures, especially where promotional communication and advertising is concerned, is even more problematic.

This paper responds to this gap by investigating the complex cultural interpretations both producers and audiences apply to professional texts, and the potential miscommunication that may ensue. Specifically, the paper offers a situation focused approach to investigating intercultural professional communication by exploring how audiences in one cultural context interpret a professional text and give direct feedback to the producers of that text who are in another cultural context. Drawing on an approach used by Pan, Scollon and Scollon (2002), we analyze a two-year project in which business students produced a "text," sent it to students overseas who are potential clients of the text, and then exchanged feedback on the text. In the project the "text" was a special case of rich professional communication in the form of a seven minute video clip that aimed to promote a specific university program. Through our analysis of the situation specific elements that constitute the exchange of texts, we illustrate the ways in

which producers invoked meaning by using words, images, and symbols, and how the audience responded to and interpreted those texts.

1.1. Intercultural business communication

Studies have documented how culture affects international business communication (Ding, 2006; Graves, 1997; Holmes & Zaidman, 2007; Varner, 1988), and how these cultural differences create problems in international business communication exchanges (Ding, 2003; Zaidman, 2001). Other studies have suggested that current research tends to ignore the complexity of international business communication, i.e., it is not simply communication between representatives of nations or cultures (Starke-Meyerring, 2005; Varner, 2000; Yuan, 1997; Zaidman, 2001); instead, we also need to consider intra-cultural differences.

A preliminary question in research that considers cultural differences is how to conceptualize culture. The more static and traditional views of culture (Varner, 2001) lead to two approaches in professional communication—the universalist and the particularist. The universalist approach emphasizes the search for communication universals with an attempt to create presumably culture-free texts or images.

The particularist approach produced lists of traits (e.g., Hofstede, 1991) to consider when writing for various, presumably homogeneous, national audiences (Starke-Meyerring, 2005). The particularist approach has been defined in the more general intercultural communication research as the global-culture approach by Cai and Donohue (1997). In applying the approach, the analyst begins with a description of a value that is assumed to be embedded in the culture and derives from that observation a series of predictions about how participants in that culture will behave (Janosik, 1987). Differences in communication are explained by comparing the values of two or more cultures and focusing on them as the primary unit of investigation (Fisher, 1988; Stening, 1979; Varner, 1988; Vertinsky, Tse, Wehrung & Lee, 1995). Major dimensions of global cultural

variation used in intercultural communication include individualism-collectivism and high-low context differences (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988).

However, in our view, and based on recent research, international business communication is not simply the communication between representatives of nations, or of cultures. Rather, communication in the global world is much more complex (Varner, 2000; Yuan, 1997; Zaidman, 2001). Thus, the multifaceted and diverse nature of intercultural business communication means that earlier frameworks of communication are limited. For example, in a culturally diverse workplace Hymes' (1974) notion of "speech community," where members of the community hold shared cultural characteristics, is unlikely to be found. Similarly, the well-cited cultural dimensions approach (e.g., Hall, 1990, Hofstede, 1991), underpinned by the assumption that all the participants in category A adhere to a cultural trait (such as individualism), cannot be applied to globalized diverse settings and has already been heavily critiqued for essentializing difference and people within cultures (see for example, Chuang, 2003; Hegde, 1998) and for its neglect of context and other situational factors (Hegde, 1998; Katriel, 1995).

An alternative approach is the culture in context perspective. It includes a relatively small number of studies that focus mainly on intercultural interactions among individual business people in a negotiation setting. This group of studies includes research that has shown that business people do not fully conform to one cultural code and that they adapt to specific situations (Cai & Donohue, 1997; Drake, 2001; Francis, 1991). From the culture in context perspective, communicative behavior is locally managed. Although culture is not ruled out as an influence, contextual, relational and identity factors of the interaction play an important role in affecting communication behavior. The management of interchange is influenced by pragmatic aspects, such as the context in which the communication takes place and the needs of the interactants to fulfill their role requirements and to conform to the norm of reciprocity, e.g., the way negotiators

from different cultural backgrounds modify their behavior in intercultural interactions (Adler & Graham, 1989; Cai & Donohue; Drake).

An extension of this approach is the situation focused communication approach which we propose here. While this approach shares similarities with the culture-in-context approach in its focus on contextual variables, it is different from it in two aspects. First, rather than focusing on the group of participants in the context of negotiation, the situation focused communication approach extends this approach to include an investigation of individual communicators/negotiators as the primary focus of investigation in the setting of their communication, and the culturally diverse business communication style and language repertoire that each individual brings to the context. The focus thus extends to the situation of negotiation, and in particular, the situation of each of the interactants as they perform and exchange professional business communication "texts." And, as highlighted in this study, as a group of people from one country engage in professional business communication with a group in another country, not only does the group itself comprise a culturally diverse team, but the context also is often pluricultural. Thus, there is a need to recognize and acknowledge the diversity of both the communicators and the pluricultural context in which the communication takes place, including the situation of exchange.

Second, this approach considers a plural definition of culture, that is, culture is not conceptualized as a single, monolithic concept as it is often presented within the culture in context research, but rather as a collection of co-cultures comprising individuals who are co-existing and interacting alongside one another (Orbe, 1998). As well as the professional/business culture of the communicators, this approach also includes such demographic factors as age, gender, and professional roles as factors influencing communication. Thus, how audiences construct meanings of the written and visual aspects of producers' professional texts, as well as the social, contextual, and relational meanings they apply to these texts, all might contribute towards explaining the

nature as well as the challenges of intercultural business communication. It is from this perspective that we seek to explicate a study of professional communication that explores how audiences negotiate the socially and culturally constructed meanings of professional texts in pluricultural contexts.

Along with the need to develop theoretical approaches that recognize the complexity of globalized professional communication exchanges, there is a call for a more practically-oriented understanding of the field (Reinsch, 1991; 1996), which also has pedagogical significance. This call has been articulated most notably in business communication textbooks, suggesting that international business communicators need to understand the basic features about cultures, recognize cultural diversity and differences, and develop intercultural sensitivity towards such differences both within and across nations and cultural groupings (Carte & Fox, 2004; Hoft, 1995; Sriussapdaporn, 2006; Weiss, 1997).

From a pedagogical perspective, scholars have demonstrated the use of visual materials to develop intercultural sensitivity (Wilkinson, 2007). They also emphasized the importance of teaching intercultural business communication in MBA classes, preferably through interactive methodologies (Goby, 2007; Starke_Meyerring, 2005) and team approaches (Cockburn-Wootten, Holmes, & Simpson (2008). For example, Starke-Meyerring argues that professional communicators who operate on the basis of a concept of culture as hybrid, heterogeneous, complex, and constantly renegotiated need to be able to engage in collaborative inquiry across various boundaries to identify multiple perspectives, genre conventions, tacit assumptions, and interpretive strategies. These various strands provide resources for new shared, negotiated, and transformed meanings. For this purpose, students need to develop a set of heuristics with which they can better understand, discuss and reflect on their own written and cultural literacy practices. Such heuristics can help them later, as professional communicators, to negotiate genre conventions and other assumptions about the structure of communication, and examine possible

communication problems jointly with other team members or with their audiences in diverse intercultural settings. We respond to this methodological call in this paper through our intercultural exchange of a professional text, and through the theoretical and methodological tools we apply in analyzing the findings.

In the following sections of the paper we discuss our two research questions and the theoretical framework we draw on to answer these questions, namely concepts and approaches from the fields of visual anthropology and advertising. Next, we explain their application in the research design of the study. We then present and discuss the emergent findings from the audience responses to a promotional text (in this case, the video clips) in light of these frameworks. We conclude by evaluating the contribution of our approach and the insights it offers to better understand intercultural professional communication.

1.2. Conceptual frameworks and research questions

Our study aims to understand how people from differing cultural backgrounds engage in and successfully negotiate intercultural professional communication. More specifically, we want to explore the complex cultural interpretations that both producers and audiences apply to professional texts, and therefore, why miscommunication may occur. Therefore, the study focuses on the exchange and interpretation of rich professional communication in the form of advertising or promotional video clips that aimed to promote a specific university program. The clips, although containing words, were saturated with images. In order to understand this form of business communication we adopted two culture sensitive frameworks: Chalfen's (1987) framework of home-made visual communication, and McCracken's (1988) framework of the movement of meaning in the world of consumers' goods.

Chalfen's (1987) framework includes several useful elements for understanding how meaning is communicated through visual images. The author suggested four elements that can be used to analyze home videotapes: participants, settings, topics, and style. The participants

component involves anyone who appears in the clips. We would like to discover who was chosen to be an actor and who was excluded. The setting component refers to when and where the images or activities take place. The topic component describes the main topics or arguments that the students decided to present. The style refers to the general mood that is projected (e.g., light, jovial, serious) in the clip. Although Chalfen's framework is designed to analyze home videos, the four identified elements also offer a heuristic for identifying or interpreting the worldviews and cultural priorities of the students as filmmakers/text producers in our study, according to the choices they make about what to include or exclude, what to emphasize, and what to downplay, etc. Based on what emerged from the data, we also added two more categories: information (e.g., the amount, type, and quality of information), and language. Language emerged as an important category because the participants and audiences came from a wide range of linguistic backgrounds and many had English as an additional language. Drawing on these elements, we interpreted the clips as reflecting the worldviews and cultural priorities of the students as filmmakers/text producers.

The second framework derives from culture sensitive research in the field of advertising. As clips are created to promote a specific program or product, they can also be seen as advertisements. Yet, there are differences between professional texts and advertisements. It is possible to regard advertisements as "texts," in this case, messages that convey meaning via signs that need to be interpreted. To regard advertisements as cultural texts is also to recognize that they convey meaning by using a variety of styles—drama, rhetoric, metaphor, and so on (Domzal & Kernana, 1992). Yet, unlike professional texts, advertisements are highly manipulated representations of recognizable scenes from "real life" (Goffman, 1979). They are always commodity narratives, and typically, are telling stories of success, desire, happiness, and social fulfillment in the lives of the people who consume the right brands (Goldman & Papson, 2000). Furthermore, the contexts of professional texts and advertisements are different. Advertisements

are part of a hotly competitive advertising industry (Goldman & Papson), while professional texts, including promotional clips, usually do not partake in such competition.

However, how can advertising research be useful in analyzing business and professional texts? Advertisements tell the consumers which products and services they should purchase and what social ideas and values are "normal" for different segments of the population. Values embedded in advertisements can be used to understand the cultures within which they are created (Frith, 1998; McLuhan, 1964; Okigbo, Martin, & Amienyi, 2005). Similarly, one can look at the clips as advertisements through which the filmmakers are conveying values. We would like to explore what values producers in one situational context communicate and how audiences from another situational context respond to them.

In line with this approach we adopted McCracken's (1988) framework of the movement of meaning in the world of consumers' goods. According to McCracken, meaning is usually drawn from the culturally constituted world and transferred to the consumer, often via advertisements. Instead of discussing the general concept of culture which can be too encompassing, McCracken suggested looking at the culturally constituted world which can be characterized in terms of two concepts: cultural categories and cultural principles. Cultural categories are the fundamental co-ordinates of meaning. They represent the basic distinctions with which a culture divides up the phenomenal world. These categories include time, space, nature, and person which combine to create many other, secondary categories and the conceptual grid of a culturally constituted world. Several of these general cultural categories overlap with Chalfen's (1987) framework. They are person (participants), time, space, and nature. By focusing on these categories, as well as any others that may emerge (e.g., in our study, the categories "information" and "language"), it is possible to interpret producers' choices for making meaning in professional texts, and to explain possible communication gaps when the message crosses borders to diverse audiences in another cultural context.

According to McCracken (1988), meaning consists also in cultural principles, i.e., the ideas or values according to which cultural phenomena are organized, evaluated, and construed. They are orienting ideas of thought and action which find expression in every aspect of social life. Meaning, to become resident in consumer goods, must be transferred from the cultural world to the good itself. A creative director, for example, identifies in the cultural world those categories and principles that most closely approximate the meaning that the consumer seeks for the product. Then s/he selects the elements that are used to evoke meaning in an advertisement. In line with this approach our intention is to identify what cultural categories and principles shape the texts—the images, words, and symbols in the clips—and how these messages are interpreted by a different audience from another county. Hence, our first research question:

R.Q. 1 What variables of both the film makers and target audience influence production and interpretation of a professional text?

Success in intercultural business communication can be interpreted in light of Zhang and Gelb's (1996) argument that consumers respond favorably to advertising messages that are congruent with their culture, and reward advertisers who understand their culture and tailor their advertisements to reflect its values. Effective advertisements are those that reflect consumer perceptions and expectations faithfully (Domzal & Kernana, 1992). With regard to images, several studies found that culture influences the interpretation of symbols in technology-based business communication (Albritton, Bendriss & Hahs Vaughn, 2006; Hedberg & Brown, 2002). For example, in the case of clip art, Hedberg and Brown found that students did not always interpret visual information in the manner expected by the original designers. Therefore, how audiences in situationally and culturally diverse contexts interpret symbols and images in professional texts also needs further investigation. By applying these arguments to our case we questioned whether the producers of the texts (students) took the role of creative directors, identifying the cultural world of their colleagues (audience) overseas, and therefore, whether they

selected the elements, i.e., words, images and symbols, that evoked culturally appropriate meanings (McCracken 1988). Hence our second research question:

R.Q. 2. What constitutes a successful "text" within the context of intercultural professional communication?

Our research is a response to the need to better understand the complexity of global professional communication. It also responds to the critique that, due to limited and conventional research methodologies, studies in the field support narrow research paradigms on repetitive topics (Tucker, Powell & Meyer, 1995). In this paper we offer a "situation focused" communication approach that considers the complexity of contemporary global professional communication.

This approach complements the "culture in context" approach (Cai & Donahue, 1997; Francis, 1991), which focuses on contextual variables, by also including the meaning that culturally diverse communicators (producers and audiences) bring to the communication text and context. To this end, our approach responds to Starke Meyering's (2005) call for a more critical understanding of professional business communication, by exploring how professional communicators identify and interpret multiple perspectives, genre conventions, and tacit assumptions to construct new (un)shared, negotiated, and transformed meanings within a more fluid and complex understanding of culture. To achieve this goal, we suggest using a qualitative methodology which applies an interactive method as an appropriate heuristic for analyzing contemporary professional communication across and within pluricultural contexts.

2. Research Design

The video exchange project is grounded in a methodology developed by Pan, Scollon and Scollon (2002). In their project "professional communication across cultures" Pan et al. designed a program by which people in business organizations or governmental agencies could exchange

professional communication portfolios across different regional and cultural offices. In each site they asked people to develop portfolios of their own best professional communications, for example, resumes, videos of presentations, and business cards, which they then sent to two other sites. In each site they led focus groups to look at and respond not only to their own portfolios, but also to the portfolios of those from the other sites. In a second round they asked participants to respond to the responses from the other sites in order to initiate a dialog and establish the preferable way of communication. It is this process that guided and inspired our exchange project.

The research design in our study involved eight student groups (with four to five participants in each group) in the making and analyzing of eight clips (four made in New Zealand, and four made in Israel) as part of students' class work. The student groups each constructed a video of a sales presentation: an academic program within the students' respective business schools. The purpose of the clip was to encourage students from the target culture to enroll in the program. The groups were not given any instructions about the production of the clip, except a time limit of seven minutes. The clips were then exchanged between the Israeli and New Zealand classes. We conducted the experience over two years. In each year two groups in Israel and two in New Zealand produced a clip which was then exchanged with their respective audiences in the other country. Therefore, our analysis draws on participants' responses to eight clips in total (1).

2.1 Participants

As Pan et al.(2002) argue, since the international workplace is complex, it cannot be assumed that there are only two cultures involved in an intercultural interaction. Similarly, in this study, although the professional texts were exchanged between two nation states—Israel and New Zealand—within each group there was much cultural diversity. The New Zealand group included about one third international students, who came mainly from China; there were also students from Europe, the Pacific, New Zealand Maori, and other cultural/ethnic groups living in New

Zealand. The Israeli group of students was also diverse. It included Israeli born students as well as students from the former USSR. Thus, it is not possible *a priori* to refer to the "New Zealand culture" or the "Israeli culture." As we make sense of our data, our situation-in-context approach seeks to accommodate an understanding of culture that might also be fluid, heterogeneous and complex. Similarly, we believe other "ports" of business communication exchange, such as culturally diverse organizations and multinational corporations, share this complexity in terms of their communication.

The Israeli class consisted of students enrolled in an MBA degree who were participating in a module on culture and international business. The students from New Zealand, in their final year of an undergraduate business degree, were enrolled in a paper about intercultural communication.

As the project was repeated in the following year, altogether, four clips from New Zealand and four from Israel (eight clips in total) made up the data for our analysis. The number of responding Israeli students during the two-year project was as follows: 10, 8, 14, and 14; and the number of responding students from New Zealand was: 14, 10, 16, and 20.

2.2 Method

Student audiences viewed the clips produced by their overseas colleagues during their classes. After viewing they were required to write down their responses to the following questions:

1. What is your first impression of this video tape?
2. What worked well in the presentation?
3. What seemed confusing or unclear?
4. What was missing?
5. What was present in the video that seemed unnecessary?

6. What changes would you make to improve the video?

2.3 Data analysis

Applying the two culture sensitive frameworks of Chalfen (1987) and McCracken (1988) discussed above, we analyzed how the participants created their texts through the use of words, images, and symbols, and the cultural and social contexts they chose to explain their texts. We also collated the written responses of the audiences to the questions above to analyze how their colleagues—the student audience overseas—interpreted these texts. Through our analysis we were able to establish the range of cultural as well as other contextual variables that are relevant to the communication events of people in specific contexts.

Our first step was to arrange separately, for each clip, all the responses from the Israeli students and all of those from the New Zealand students. For each clip, we divided the responses into the four categories identified by Chalfen (1987): participants, settings, topic, and style. However, from the data that remained we were able to identify two more categories: information, and language, which we have included in the presentation of findings that follows. Our next step was to analyze the responses within each category. We collected similar and dissimilar responses and grouped them together into several themes. We repeated the procedure for all the categories mentioned above. Since the number of participants was small we decided not to apply a quantitative measure, but only to distinguished between dominant themes and less dominant themes. We considered a dominant theme an argument that was raised by approximately half of the number of responses in a specific class (see Appendix A). In keeping with qualitative research, we also collected and analyzed responses that we considered important, even if they were introduced by one or two individuals only, because we believe that these, too, shed light on intercultural professional communication processes. There were also sporadic remarks that we

discussed that reflected a response to a unique feature of a specific clip. Thus, we ended up with responses to a set of themes within each of the six topics across eight clips.

3. Results

In the following section we present and analyze the responses of students according to the six categories of participants, setting, topics, style, information, and language. The analysis considers data that is relevant to the two research questions of the paper: the variables that influence the production and interpretation of professional communication texts, and the elements that lead to success (or failure) in intercultural professional communication.

3.1 Participants (Person*)*

Our attempt in this section is to describe and analyze choices regarding the participants in the video clips and the role they played (Chalfen, 1987). We found that, generally, the student film producers from Israel and New Zealand had different expectations regarding the choice of the participants (who were mainly students and lecturers).

The responses of all four groups of Israelis showed that they preferred "authority figures" (to use their terminology). They expressed this preference by making compliments when these figures appeared in the clips of their student counterparts, as indicated in the following response: "It was good to show staff members such as teachers, advisors and administrators. This helps to know that you do have someone to rely on in case of a question, need, etc."

Israeli students also praised the appearance of university lecturers on the screen. The professors were described as pleasant, coming from different countries, and they "delivered a message of something serious and interesting."

By contrast, all four groups of students from New Zealand expected to see more students (either Israelis or foreigners) in the Israeli students' clips.

These findings demonstrate the limitation of national culture as an approach to explaining intercultural communication behavior. We could expect that Israelis, who are low in power

distance (Meshulam, 1994), would not be so keen about the presentation of authority figures. Yet, we found that they preferred that the message in the clip be delivered by authorized or serious people, i.e., those on whom one can depend. In this case, the dimensions of the national culture did not explain the students' choices, but rather, as we shall explain later, other situational variables provided richer heuristics.

While we found differences between students from Israel and New Zealand in their expectations regarding the participants, they both expressed positive remarks about their counterparts' choices of people who took the role of cultural mediators. For example, one New Zealand clip included an Israeli lecturer working in the university there. The Israeli students remarked on the importance of including an interview with an Israeli professor because it helped to reduce feelings of distance. One student said: "I liked that. It shows that they are pro-Israel and today it is very important for us, to go to places where we are welcomed and can feel safe." (See Appendix B, Video Clip One). These comments show the importance Israeli students placed on receiving communication signals that reduce their anxieties about and distance from a foreign place (2).

Students from New Zealand expressed similar opinions regarding a former lecturer from a New Zealand university, who was teaching at the university of the Israeli student producers and who promoted the Israeli program in two Israeli clips. The New Zealand students commented: "[It] makes us feel closer to them; it is something [that] connects both of us." And "[the] audience could easily identify with him.

Thus, both populations of students applauded the presence of people who were associated with their own country in the clips of the other group. These responses indicate that there is a distance which can be bridged by "cultural mediators" such as cultural compatriots.

The representation of "home" was also performed by an extensive use of objects by the cultural mediators whom the audience had praised, such as the Israeli lecturer in New Zealand

who placed a book with the title in Hebrew clearly displayed while talking to the camera. Another example was the former New Zealand lecturer, now working in Israel, who wore the All Black rugby T-shirt and displayed his New Zealand passport. One student commented that such images created a "common ground."

Students' responses about the participants in clips also included remarks about gender choices and sexuality. Students from New Zealand criticized one Israeli clip, arguing that there were no females in it and that "this can be seen as sexist." One student said: "There needs to be a female point of view in the video, in terms of a speaking part, rather than just visuals of women. This could capture the female market."

Some of the Chinese students from New Zealand expressed negative responses about a scene of two young people hugging, which appeared in an Israeli clip. The students noted that the shot of "the lovers" was unnecessary, with no relevance, and even embarrassing. One Chinese student said: "The embracing couple in the video looks not very proper." There were also negative remarks from students from New Zealand about another clip in which the camera focused on a young attractive woman who did not speak. The students asked why this image was necessary.

How can the data regarding the choices of participants and the audience response be analyzed? Our initial question is: Can we apply the notion of "cultural category" (McCracken, 1988) when dealing with such heterogeneous populations as was the case in our study? Our findings over the two years showed that students from New Zealand hold similar perspectives about the cultural category "person." The category refers to two basic elements: the first is the inclusion of young people; the second is the expectation of equal representation of men and women. Similarly, consistency also appeared in the choices of Israeli students, who preferred to see authority figures and the representation of men over women as a source of information. Thus, there are differences in the meaning attributed to the cultural category "person."

Both intra- and intercultural differences emerged among the New Zealand and Israeli student groups regarding norms of interaction in the public domain (Frith, 1998; McLuhan, 1964; Okigbo et al., 2005). While Israeli students depicted as legitimate images of intimate relationships between the sexes and portrayed young attractive women as part of their sales pitch, students from New Zealand expressed more restricted norms of intimacy in public. Generally, students from New Zealand perceived women as equal in the public domain of business communication, and rejected the choice of "winking" towards women's sexuality and using them as objects of attraction, a draw card in the Israeli student producers' eyes. Furthermore, some of the Chinese participants' disapproval of the image of a female embracing a male is indicative of their disapproval of public displays of emotion and intimacy (Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998).

As noted earlier, the actors in most of the clips from both countries were students or lecturers. Thus, the directors chose participants from the (shared) context of the university. An exception was one Israeli clip that included actors that were connected to the university, but indirectly. The choice to include two honoured graduates, the former French Prime Minister, Francois Mitterand, and in particular, Roberto Benigni, an Italian actor, created much confusion for some of the New Zealand students because they were unknown personalities. One New Zealand student said: "It wasn't clear if they were acting or if they were graduating from the university." Another student suggested that "the two important people in the commencement ceremony should have a name title to emphasize how famous and important they are." A further "actor," unknown to the diverse students in the New Zealand audience, was the statue of David Ben Gurion, the first Israeli Prime Minister and an important figure in the history of the state of Israel. Students from New Zealand suggested adding an explanation to the statue.

Scollon and Scollon (2001) argued that communication works better the more the communicators share assumptions and knowledge about the world, based on common histories, cultures, and life experiences. The examples described above demonstrate the difficulty in making

inferences when there is lack of common context. The participants who were not associated with the shared university context created confusion. Thus, we can generalize that in intercultural professional communication, when the producers of information deviate from the boundaries of the shared conceptual world, in this case, the world of students and lecturers, they minimize the audience's ability to make inferences, and thus reduce the chance to be understood.

3.2 Settings (space)

In the following section we discuss students' expectations and their critical analysis of settings, in the form of the presentation of places, facilities, and geographical space.

Our findings showed that there is a need for student producers from both countries to capture the macro- as well as micro- setting of the new place. Student audiences from Israel and New Zealand expected to get information about the country, its landscape, and the location of the university in the region. Similarly, student audiences from both countries valued pictures of the university setting itself, including both its study facilities (e.g., buildings and laboratories), as well as the facilities that are associated with students' social life (e.g., student residences). They expected a balanced presentation of the university and its facilities, and the university within the general geographical and sociocultural space. They critiqued the clips that were one sided in their presentation of either of these two aspects.

The responses of Israeli students to one New Zealand clip demonstrated these findings. Almost all the respondents were not satisfied with the setting. They argued that, generally, the New Zealand clips placed too much emphasis on the presentation of scenery, while too little attention was given to the university setting, for example: "The video begins with a long description of the lovely scenery of New Zealand, but not because of it [will] students from across the world . . . come to study in this university."

Despite similarities between both Israeli and New Zealand student audiences regarding the setting, we found that slightly more New Zealand students expected to see shots of student social

life at the university. This finding corresponds with our findings regarding the participants. Students from New Zealand were interested in seeing more students, and in receiving more visual and content information about the facilities that are part of student life, including their social life.

Communication problems appeared when students chose concepts and images that were rich in local connotations. One Israeli clip focused on the "promised land," (the country that God promised to Abraham and his people) as the main motive for coming to study in Israel (see Appendix B, Video Clip Two). This well known promise, at least among Jews in Israel, appears in the bible (Genesis, 15,18). Thus, the Israeli students chose to use a concept that is "thick" in terms of its local cultural connotations (Geertz, 1983). But the audience from New Zealand had difficulties interpreting this thick concept. Many of them said that they did not understand the message about the promised land.

Another example of what appeared as a "culturally thick" concept was found in the responses of Israeli students to the projection of a church in a New Zealand clip. Two Israelis said: "Students from New Zealand should know that their target audience is Jewish, and that we will be interested in synagogues and that we do not attend churches. Some people could be offended by it." Here, the Israeli students were using self-reference criteria that pertained only to their situational context when reviewing the images of a church, resulting in negative evaluations and judgments of the New Zealand clip, responses which the New Zealand producers had not anticipated.

Thus, as was the case with the category "participants", communication went well when students provided information that was not "culturally condensed" on the macro and micro level. However, when producers used culturally thick concepts or images, the audience responded negatively.

3.3 Topics (time, nature)

What main topics appeared in the video clips? Why did student producers choose these topics? And what were student audiences' responses to them?

Where McCracken's (1988) categories of "time" and "nature" are concerned, two major topics emerged from the data. Further topics to emerge reflected the concerns and interests of the producers and the audience.

One topic appearing in the clips, and significant for both Israel and New Zealand students, was the presentation of life as either relaxed or with a task oriented focus. These foci created a continuum which we defined as the "relax-study" continuum. Israelis tended to express opinions reflecting the importance they attributed to "study" and the task oriented side of this continuum, while New Zealand students expressed views favoring the "relaxed" aspect. An example is the Israeli audience's response to a clip, which they argued, emphasized themes such as "relaxing," "vacation," "free time activities," and "nature," rather than studying or promoting a business school. The Israeli students were critical about the message of the clip and the lack of focus on the program itself. With regard to another clip, several Israeli students commented that there was not enough information about the university, the program, and the requirements to get accepted. The dominant argument was that there should be more focus on the program and studies rather than on nature and relaxation. Several students said that they were confused about the goal of the clip: "If at all, the film convinced me to visit the place rather than to learn there." A similar position was expressed by a student who argued that "the University seems appealing to those who like the outdoors, but it might have a wider appeal if the emphasis wasn't so one-sided."

Students from New Zealand, on the other hand, applauded the "relax" aspects as well as the balanced "relaxed-study" themes in the Israeli clips. One student commented that the clip showed "a very colorful and relaxed campus life" and "some freedom, clean, and leisure atmosphere, it is a high developed place, . . . good environment and facilities for study."

The differences in the content of the New Zealand and Israeli clips, as well as students' interpretations of them, reflect the different perspectives of the cultural categories "time" and "nature." Student producers from New Zealand, more than students from Israel, chose to exhibit situations that were associated with "leisure time" activities, while Israeli students portrayed activities that were associated with work. Students from New Zealand emphasized "nature" while Israeli students promoted a "task oriented" setting. When Israeli students focused on nature, they depicted it primarily as idealized nature, that is, the "man-made" nature of the university setting (e.g., the planned palm trees and the small stream of water running artificially on a designed stone valley in the university yard); only brief footage was given to the raw nature of the Negev desert.

By, contrast, New Zealand students showed more footage of "wild nature" in the form of native bush, natural streams, and mountains. Research has suggested that nature is an important component in advertisements. For example, Green (1996) drew on the pastoral myth, the idea that humanity is both in nature and a part of nature, to demonstrate how nature is encompassed in advertisements for technological products such as automobiles. Similarly, nature appeared in both Israeli and New Zealand students' clips. However, as the examples above illustrate, students in each culture emphasised quite different aspects of nature, suggesting the heterogeneous values placed on nature by people from different cultures.

Another topic raised by the student audiences was the juxtaposition of multiculturalism and local culture. Students from both countries expressed expectations to see manifestations of both multiculturalism and local culture in the clips. Israeli students said: "The film succeeded to pass the message that the program suits foreign students and that the university has students from many different cultures." Another Israeli student said:

> It was good to mention out that this university is based on students from different cultures and countries to make future students understand that they have nothing to be afraid and that everybody is in the same position and status.

> This thing helps to lower the anxiety level and to help overcome the fears of studying and succeeding in a foreign university so far away from home. (See Appendix B, Video Clip One).

Similarly, students from New Zealand expressed interest in the presentation of a "multicultural environment." One person remarked positively about this aspect, while others commented on its absence: "a scene of intercultural communication between native [Israeli] students and foreign students is missing."

Students from New Zealand also expressed interest in the representation of the local culture. One student remarked that the "background music, Israeli national flag, and some Israeli students close up are very good because these specifics could express their own country characteristic" and arouse interest. (See Appendix B, Video Clip Two). Another student said: "The Israel cultural experience is lacking."

The theme "safe place" appeared in a variety of ways in the clips, as well as in both the Israeli and New Zealand students' responses. This theme does not reflect the direct experience of students within the university setting, but their lives as individuals under the threat of terrorist attacks. Altogether, this theme was quite problematic.

For example, one New Zealand clip promoted New Zealand as a safe place, which generally, is a common cultural affirmation among New Zealanders themselves about their country's geographical location, isolated from war and terrorism. Israeli students responded negatively. They said:

> Talking about New-Zealand as a safe place is very unnecessary and harmful. Israel, although [sic] its present situation with the Palestinians, isn't less safe than any other place in the world. Terrorist acts are happening today all over the world (USA, Spain, Turkey, etc.) and saying that Israel isn't safe is wrong, unnecessary, and annoying.

Another Israeli student said that raising the topic creates antagonism. Similarly, students in another group responded to the same topic: “We surely know that New Zealand is a much safer place than Israel, but this is a very sensitive issue for us.” And another student commented, “I would have taken out the sayings that New Zealand is a very safe place as opposed to Israel. I found it screeching, and not a wise subject to go into without knowing the Israeli average student opinion regarding the subject.” Interestingly, one student from the New Zealand audience also reflected on the issue of safety: “Is Israel really safe for us? [The Israeli clip] doesn’t mention war with Iraq and safety issues.”

Our results show that topics can be interpreted in unexpected and negative ways. The response of the Israeli students to the depiction of a church (Video Clip One) is similar to their responses about the notion of a safe place. In both cases the Israeli students responded negatively to images and concepts that upset their national and religious feelings. The data presented above confirm the basic instruction of business etiquette that one should avoid discussing religion and politics because they are emotionally loaded. Yet, ignoring a sensitive topic, such as security in Israel, could also raise doubts, as the student in the New Zealand audience pointed out. Furthermore, the position taken by the Israeli student demonstrates the need in pluricultural contexts and exchanges to engage people in open discussion of political and religious difference in order to break down barriers and avoid the potential conflict and misunderstanding implicit in this example.

3.4 Style

Where the general mood of each clip was concerned, a similar set of criteria was used by both New Zealand and Israeli groups. Students from each country applauded clips by using positive terms such as: “funny, cheerful, light, vivid, happy, alive” and “dynamic.” They commented positively in the following ways: “the clip is selling fun and young spirit. It is a nice MTV-like movie, beautiful, contain[ing] humor, clear, attractive, and interesting” (Israeli

student), and “the rhythm of this video is hot [exciting]” (student from New Zealand). The negative terms that they used mirrored the positive terms, for example: “no humour, boring, dry” and “lacks energy.” Examples are: “the film seemed to be a bit tiring” (Israeli student), and “a bit too serious, and a bit too dry” (student from New Zealand).

In general, the pattern that emerged was mixed. That is, Israeli students both applauded and criticized clips from New Zealand, using the same criteria and expressing similar opinions as the New Zealand students expressed about the Israeli clips. There were one or two sporadic remarks made by New Zealand students that support a previous finding: “It seems that the clip is aimed at parents rather than at students.”

However, one exception was an Israeli student’s response to one of the New Zealand clips which had been filmed in fast forward mode. The Israeli students praised the clip saying that it was “funny and serious, nice, cheerful and light.” Others said that the clip “gives [a] good feeling, makes you want to be a part of them;” “there was no ‘distance’ at all between us and them, despite of [sic] the geographic distance.” Yet, the majority of the students were critical about the fast forward rhythm of the movie, which was perceived as “very confusing,” “exhausting,” and created difficulties for grasping new information.

Thus, the range of responses within both the Israeli and New Zealand groups to the stylistic features of the videos suggests the need to consider how audiences within a culture respond differently and that individuals bring their own constructions and interpretations to various stylistic effects.

3.5 Information

This category is the first of two that we added to Chalfen’s framework. As the student audiences’ comments below suggest, this category was important in enabling us to identify the extent to which participants felt that the clip provided sufficient and quality information about the program of study.

Israeli students in three groups expected more information about the university (e.g., location of the university); the university facilities, such as library, studying rooms, laboratories and dormitory; the program (e.g., the number of courses); the program's benefits; tuition fees and scholarships; descriptions of social activities (e.g., parties, night clubs, sports facilities); profile of faculty members; and students' employment possibilities.

The positive remarks showed that Israeli students were looking for concrete data. They complimented information on any of the topics mentioned above, as indicated by the following: "One thing that I found missing in the clip was data, information, more depth. There was too much fun in the clips and less information." They also commented that there was "too much stress on nature and area [scenic] pictures" and that the details about courses, scholarships or any research opportunities were missing. One student said: "Are [sic] those guys really want me to study there??? If so, why haven't they supplied me with important information."

By contrast, the New Zealand students' responses to the information in the Israeli clips were both positive and negative. Some argued that the clips were "very informative;" others thought that they contained too much information; still others thought that some information was missing. For example, about half the students were positive about the information provided in one clip. They applauded the information regarding how the program works, who may apply, the overview of the University, size and location. Yet, other students were negative, arguing that the clip contained a lot of information and that "it is a little overwhelming." One of them said:

> I wouldn't use as much information as it becomes overloading and distracts you from the important information. I found that there wasn't really any information that actually grabbed my attention to actually want to go to Israel. I was interested in the social aspects of the university. This would influence my decision to go there to study.

To summarize, the respective student audiences demonstrated a range of different expectations regarding the amount and type of information that should be presented in the clips. Generally, students from Israel expected detailed information. Several students from New Zealand responded in similar way, while others argued that the Israeli clips included too much information.

3.6 Language

As a result of the emergent data, as noted earlier, we added a second category to Chalfen's (1988) framework: language. In this study, both groups consisted of linguistically diverse audiences, and both groups had bi- or multicultural language policies underpinning their national identity. Student audiences' responses to language covered areas such as language choice, accent, clarity, and metaphorical language.

Where language choices were concerned, one Israeli student spoke positively about the use of Hebrew in a New Zealand clip: "Hearing an Israeli talking in Hebrew about the university makes a great difference and really helps to lower the anxiety level and to help overcome the fears of studying and succeeding in a foreign university so far away from home." Other students said that hearing Hebrew (even just one word, "Shalom") made them feel at home. Similarly, New Zealand students commented on the use of the Maori word "Kia ora" or "Hello." The use of this greeting is common in New Zealand, even among non-Maori speakers, and the New Zealand students commented that hearing this greeting created a common ground and empathy with their cultural context. Thus, for both groups, greetings in a language that is familiar to the target audience helped to lessen cultural distance and language anxiety.

Second, both Israeli and New Zealand student audiences commented on the difficulty they had in understanding the actors' accents. In the case of Video Clip One (see Appendix Two) in response to the question "What was confusing or unclear?" Israeli participants referred to their difficulties in understanding what the actors were saying due to their accent. Similar responses

appeared in relation to the other three New Zealand clips, although to a lesser extent. The Israeli audience suggested using a narrator with an American accent: “I would let the American girl to present the program since her accent is much more understandable by Israelis”. Several Israeli students recommended using subtitles “in order to overcome the sound, language and accent difficulties.” They also suggested choosing actors who could speak more clearly. While the students from New Zealand appeared to be less concerned about accent, like Israelis, they were concerned about speed and clarity. For example, the majority of the New Zealand student audiences’ responses to the clip “The promised land” said that the presenter talked too fast and that it was hard to understand the narration. They asked for “clear” and “slow speaking” narration. Likewise, in clips where actors spoke slowly and clearly, student audience responses were positive. Both Israeli and New Zealand audiences recommended the use of text on the screen, in the form of captions and subtitles, in order to clarify and add information.

A final point concerned the use of metaphor. Two New Zealand students questioned the meaning of the statement of one of the Israeli actors that “miracles happened everyday.” The students asked: “What is the ‘miracle’ which the first professor mentioned in his speech?” They suggested: “It would have been great to have examples shown.”

Thus, student audience evaluations applauded the adoption of greetings in the target language of the audience to reduce language anxiety, lessen distance, and create feelings of common ground. They also negatively evaluated accent in that it created a barrier to message reception. Comments from both countries also suggested that student producers had not given sufficient thought to the linguistic diversity and knowledge of their target audiences. Finally, language choice, in this case, metaphorical references, created gaps in message understanding.

4. Discussion

The audiences' responses within the various categories identified in the findings above indicate the importance of understanding the cultural references that each member brings to the interpretation of a text in professional business communication in a global context. That student audiences interpreted the six categories of participants, settings (space), topics (time, nature), style, information, and language in a range of different ways is indicative of the ways in which individuals within an audience may construct understandings of cultural messages in texts. In light of these multiple interpretations of the clips, what, then, are the variables of both the film producers and the target audiences that, in this specific situation, influence the production and interpretation of professional texts?

Our data show that several variables do have an impact in this process. These are 1) demographic features, in particular age, 2) differing socio-cultural environments, and 3) differing intra- as well as intercultural values.

The first variable is the gap in age between students from New Zealand and those from Israel. This gap is also expressed in the student audiences' life cycles: Israeli students are slightly older compared to students from New Zealand. The majority of them have families, and fulltime jobs. These students started their academic career at the age of 22 to 23, after their mandatory service in the Israeli army. They began their second degree at the age of 26 or27. On the other hand, students from New Zealand, including the international Chinese students, were enrolled in the third or fourth year of their undergraduate degree and tended not to have professional work experience, having moved from secondary to university education for the most part. Their respective attitudes towards study reflected these experiences. For example, the Israeli audience preferred specific and detailed information about the program of study which might enhance their career prospects whereas students in the New Zealand audience, in particular, the New Zealand born participants, in keeping with their preference for a "relaxed" approach to university life, were more concerned about balancing pleasure with study.

We believe that this gap has an impact on students' expectations regarding the actors in the text as well as on the desired information. Thus, for students from New Zealand, the category "person" referred to the inclusion of young people. They were interested in seeing more students, both male and female, and in receiving more information about the facilities that were part of student life. By contrast, Israeli students preferred to see authority figures that reflected the quality of the university and program.

The gap in age also explains different expectations regarding the amount and quality of information that should be presented in the clips. Students from Israel expected detailed information that demonstrated the quality and nature of the program, and several students from New Zealand responded in a similar way. Yet other New Zealand students argued that the Israeli clips included too much information of a "serious" nature, with not enough emphasis on the social environment of the university

The second variable influencing the production and interpretation of texts is the general socio-cultural environment of both producers and audience, reflecting on their choices regarding "time" and "settings." Students from New Zealand chose to present situations that were associated with "leisure time" activities, while Israeli students focused on activities that were associated with "work time." These differences could be attributed to age gaps as discussed above, but also to the competition for employment opportunities in Israel (depicted in images of multinational companies where graduates from that program might expect to work). By contrast, the responses of the New Zealand audiences, including the Chinese international students among them, seemed less concerned with career prospects, perhaps because for the most part they were unmarried and much younger.

Furthermore, students from New Zealand emphasized the setting "nature," while Israeli students focused on task-oriented settings. When each group did focus on nature, they interpreted it differently, with the Israeli students focusing on the "man-made nature" of the university setting

while the New Zealand students preferred "wild nature." The different choices made by the producers in depicting the socio-cultural environment can be interpreted as resulting from the influence of the central role of the nature truism in New Zealand (which does not exist to the same extent in Israel), as well as on age differences between the students from both countries. Such choices can enhance or reduce affinity between producers and their audiences, thus impacting on the success of the communication.

Third, the cultural background of the student audiences influenced their interpretation of the clips. Students of Maori origin who were members in one of the teams from New Zealand used Maori symbols such as the haka—a Maori war dance commonly used as a welcome to overseas visitors). The New Zealand producers also chose both contemporary images of popular culture or "Kiwiana" (the toy bumble bee, and the soft drink "Lemon and Paeroa") and the fern from which the national emblem, the silver fern, is derived. Instead, the clip produced by a group of Chinese international students showed greater resemblance to the Israeli clips in that it eschewed "wild nature" for a more pragmatic representation of the program in line with the Israeli themes of quality of the program, depicted by its "number one" rating across business schools in New Zealand, and verified by an "authority" figure as was also demonstrated in some of the Israeli clips.

Choice of images also needs to consider the moral and ethical backgrounds of the audience. The Chinese students' disapproval of the image of couples embracing in public can perhaps be attributed to their Confucian values of morality and virtue, and the need to behave appropriately in order to bring respect to the family. For a different reason—that of gender equality—images of women as alluring, as portrayed in one of the Israeli clips, were also criticized by New Zealand born female members of the audience because they showed women as "sex objects," thus denigrating their role as equal and contributing members of society. Gender equality is a strong value among both New Zealand males and females. That the Israeli producers

chose such images can be interpreted as reflecting their tendency for "permissible boundaries" (Shamir & Melnik 2002) Thus, a piece of professional communication might include images that are subject to multiple interpretations across pluricultural audiences, as well as invoking conflicting value judgments.

Regarding our second research question—What constitutes a successful "text" within the context of intercultural professional communication? we found that confusion appeared when students chose concepts and images that were rich in "local connotations" and were not related to the shared world, such as the notion of the "promised land." Negative feelings, creating failure in communication, were aroused when student groups made references to religious monuments other than their own,(for example, the Israeli audience's disapproval of the image of a cross on a church steeple), or when they referred, even in an indirect way, to the political situation (for example, the Israeli audience's negative reaction to the theme of New Zealand as a safe place, from which the Israeli students inferred that their New Zealand audience must consider Israel to be unsafe).

Successful elements in texts took place when students from both countries created bridges over cultural differences by using elements from their common professional culture. That is, both Israeli and New Zealand populations shared the world of being students in a management school in a "Western" university. When producers designed a text by using elements from their shared context (i.e., the university) communication went well.

Furthermore, the presence of "cultural mediators" who represented "home," by an extensive use of participants, symbols/images, and language was useful. Positive audience responses to these themes indicate that there is a distance which can be bridged by "cultural mediators," thus making connections between the lived experiences of the audience and the product being advertised.

The findings from this study suggest several implications for promoting successful intercultural communication in professional business communication contexts. Our emergent

findings indicate that producers of professional texts should consider the appropriate representation of the actors or participants in their texts, including their nonverbal communication and the roles they enact (see Goffman's (1979) categories for the analysis of gender advertising, and Waters and Ellis (1996) regarding sexuality in advertising). They should assess their own expectations as well as those of their audience, regarding the quality and amount of information presented. While doing so, producers might consider several communicative characteristics of their audience, for example, the value the audience places on context (i.e., low context or high context, Hall, 1990), and the ways in which power distance is portrayed among actors. They might also acknowledge the extent to which the audience has been exposed to, for example, the utilitarian discourse of professional communication texts (Scollon and Scollon, 2001; Zaidman, 2001). They should consider the values and meaning that their audience might attribute to the words, images, and symbols that are chosen in the representation of objects, places, and activities as well as those associated with time and setting such as "nature." Thus, for example, the nostalgic orientation to nature and its manifestation in advertising (Green, 1996) should not be taken as universal.

5. Conclusions

The "situation focused communication approach" was used to analyze the exchange of professional communication among two interculturally diverse audiences. Rather than emphasizing the "culture" of the communicators, this approach focuses on the situation of the exchange, including various components that have an impact on the exchange such as the demographic characteristics of the participants (e.g., age and gender) and their roles. The approach also highlights the importance of acknowledging the multiple perspectives and interpretations members of inter- and intraculturally diverse audiences bring to the professional business communication text. The situation focused communication approach accommodates the

complex and heterogeneous global work setting and suggests a way to accommodate the challenges we face in intercultural business communication.This approach can be applied to the study of a variety of professional texts such as selling or promotion clips, power point presentations that include images, company brochures and manuals, etc.

The framework we applied here, adapted from Chalfen (1987) and McCracken (1988) in their analysis of visual text and advertising, was a valuable heuristic for interpreting and evaluating intercultural professional business communication. As our study showed, two additional categories—information and language—emerged in the process of data analysis. However, researchers can use other analytical tools depending on the text itself. As discussed earlier, the analysis should consider relevant components (or variables) of the specific exchange situation, which might be different from those variables that emerged in the explanation of our data.

Finally, in order to get as close as possible to understanding the audience's point of view, we suggest eliciting the audience's direct feedback to and interpretations of the text (as suggested by Pan et al., 2002). We found that the interactive method, developed in their approach, resulted in raising text producers' awareness of the impact and manifestations of various variables on the business text. These tacit aspects of audiences' responses to professional texts emerged only as a result of our request for direct feedback from the audience. The method enables producers to understand the meaning that is associated with the text and the challenges that audiences in intercultural professional business contexts face in interpreting them. Furthermore, researchers can analyse this feedback to identify and interpret communication gaps as they emerge from the range of these situation variables and categories. The approach can also be used as part of the teaching process in business schools, as was the case in our research.

We believe that the situation focused communication approach is of great relevance to the understanding of global professional communication. It considers a group of producers and their audiences as the primary focus of investigation, alongside their production and interpretation of a professional text. In doing so, it tackles one of the most important aspects of international professional communication exchange, that of global work teams, which has been described as becoming the norm in both business and non-governmental organizations (Distefano & Maznevski, 2000).

Notes

(1) The video clips produced by the students in this professional exchange can be viewed at the home page of Dr Prue Holmes at http://www.mngt.waikato.ac.nz/staff%20List/index.asp?alpha=H&type=

(2) In this paper we discuss a special case of exchange where the participants were called to move to another country. This shift involved a need to bridge distance between the familiar and unfamiliar. Students talked about "anxiety" regarding the act of moving to a new place. The responses from both sides reflected the desire of the audience to be familiar with the people. They asked questions such as: Who are the students? Are they like us? Since they come from a different country, would they accept us? Research in uncertainty reduction theory shows that, as individuals acquire more information about one another, their uncertainty should decrease and their relationship should escalate to a more intimate level (Roloff & Anastasiou, 2001). Thus, information, as well as the mediation of cultural brokers, can reduce distance and lower anxiety.

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Appendix A: Analysis of feedback to video clips - Instructions for research assistant

1. Review the clip several times and write a description of it.

2. Make a list of the participants in the clip, indicating their role.

3. Make a list of the topics of the clip.

4. Make a list of the settings

5. Define element in the style of the clip

6. Describe the clip's forms of text presentation (include concrete data such as what is the information about)

8. Open a new file: indicate your name and date. Identify the clip that you are working on. Count the number of respondents.

9. Create lists of student's quotations regarding the participants, settings, topic, information, and style. Please include both positive and negative quotations and distinguish between them. Please also include statements about participants (or settings, etc) that are missing (e.g., students from NZ argue that there are no female students in the Israel clip).

9. For each list, group several quotations together.

Appendix B: Description of video clips

Video Clip One (produced by students from New Zealand)

The video clip opens with loud music and several titles appear on the screen: "Thinking about studying abroad?" Think about the University of Waikato." Following these titles, several iconic images that symbolize New Zealand culture and nationhood appear. Then, two male students say "Kia ora," (a Maori greeting meaning "Hello"), and then lecturer A, a female, talks about the reputation of the School in New Zealand. Lecturer B introduces herself. The two students then move across the physical environment of the campus, which is shown in fast-forward mode and accompanied by dynamic music. The students arrive at an office with a sign: "Job." Lecturer C, a female, opens with "shalom" and "kia ora." Lecturer B talks about the successes of the School's graduates in the job market. Then Lecturer A speaks about the high reputation of the School.

Next, the two students move in fast-forward mode again across campus. The camera focuses on four female students; three look foreign (two wear traditional Muslim garments and one is of Chinese ethnicity). They talk about a friendly, flexible school. The video returns to Lecturer C who discusses careers. The students are shown again in fast-forward mode crossing the campus. The video switches again to Lecturer B, who talks briefly about core courses. Again, the students move in fast-forward mode.

The camera then introduces a consultant, a male with an East Asian appearance, and immediately after that, focuses on a female standing at the School's reception desk. The clip shifts again to the students crossing the campus in fast-forward mode. The consultant then gives a relatively long explanation about services for foreign students. There are more fast-forward scenes as the students move to the entrance of the School. Next, Lecturer D, an Israeli, speaks in Hebrew about the quality of the School. The dynamic music changes to soft music. The clips

closes with the following title: “Best education, best opportunities for graduates; safest and best learning environment; best decision you will ever make.” The final image is a symbol of the University and an address for further information.

Video Clip Two (produced by students from Israel)

This video clip, entitled “Welcome to the promised land,” promoted the full-time honours MBA degree. At just over 4 minutes, the clip had a fast pace and detailed information about the degree and institution. The title appeared as a white caption over images of the Negev dessert—flora, landscape, a waterfall, an eagle, and the sun setting over the sea. Then came the white caption on a black background “and the promise,” followed by a pan of the adjacent flags of Israel and the university and the university’s name in both English and Hebrew. Topics covered in the MBA were then shown in black and white captions and narrated, followed by a series of images showing the university learning environment—contemporary buildings, students on campus, an LCD display of the stock market, classrooms, computer rooms, gardens and accommodation. Simultaneously, the narrator described these images, focusing on the advantages of studying at the university, the benefits to students, the qualification’s value, links to top universities in the United States, the quality of the professoriate, the state of the art knowledge and facilities, and Israel’s global connectedness. Further images of multinational companies demonstrated Israel’s links with leading international and domestic markets. These images were accompanied by soft, calm music beneath the narration. The narrator then concluded (which included a caption “To conclude”) by showing two famous people receiving their degrees—the former French President, François Mitterand, and a famous Italian actor who spoke of his pleasure in receiving the award. Finally, a white caption showed the Web site for further information for viewers, set against the backdrop of the main building showing the University’s logo and name (in both English and Hebrew).